



Arts and Humanities Research and Innovation

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10 December 2008

Dear Dr Soden

Please find enclosed a copy of *Arts and Humanities Research and Innovation*. This is a joint, collaborative publication by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA).

Whereas most innovation studies have focused on science and technology, this report takes an in-depth look at the role of arts and humanities research within the UK's innovation system. The arts and humanities contribute to a constantly growing body of knowledge that nourishes the nation's cultural existence, and inspires creative behaviour, as well as innovative goods and services. This report represents a new and exciting direction that more fully describes what these subjects bring to the economic prosperity and social fabric of the UK.

The report also considers the strategic role that the AHRC takes in supporting arts and humanities research within this innovation system. The AHRC's funding of collaborative, team-based research, its joint strategic initiatives with other Research Councils, and its experience-based approach to knowledge transfer provide a distinctive and increasingly effective model in supporting arts and humanities researchers in making wider contributions to the economy and society. The report also describes how the AHRC undertakes an intermediary role within the innovation system by bridging gaps between different organisations.

If you have any queries or comments on any aspect of this report, please contact Christopher Walker (c.walker@ahrc.ac.uk; tel 0117 987 6580).

Yours sincerely

Professor Philip Esler
Chief Executive

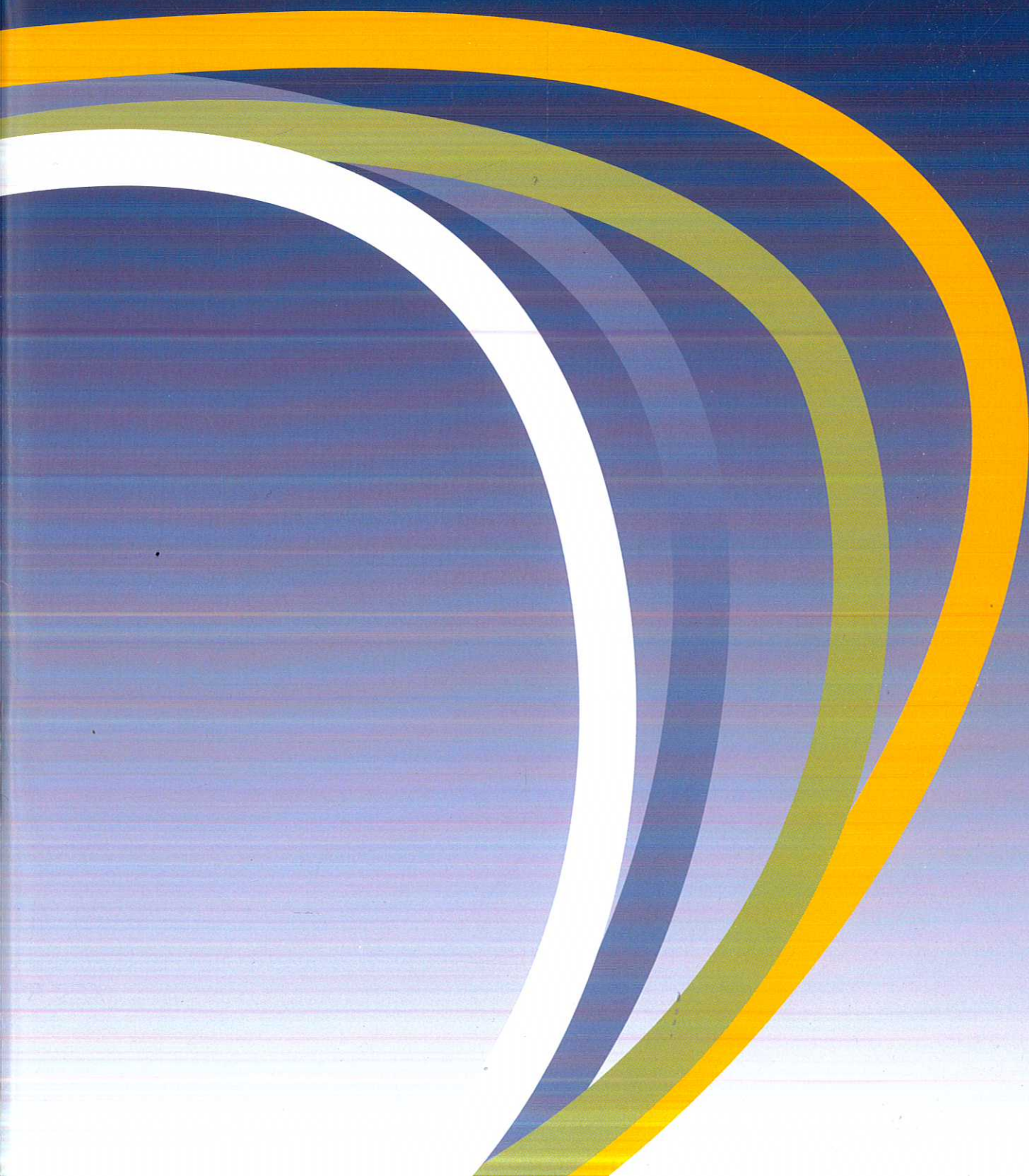


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Arts and Humanities Research and Innovation

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This report was written by Hasan Bakhshi (Research Director, Arts & Innovation, NESTA), Philippe Schneider (an independent researcher) and Christopher Walker (Impact Evaluation Manager, AHRC).

Editorial assistance was provided by Conor Ryan.

The short AHRC case studies included here illustrate some of the diverse areas that are covered by the arts and humanities. They also indicate what AHRC funding can bring to research activities by its support for various forms of collaborative project.

Interrogating cultural value in the 21st Century: the case of 'Shakespeare'

AHRC Research Grant

This project uses the Royal Shakespeare Company's Complete Works Festival, which ran from April 2006 to April 2007, to explore how England's literary heritage meets the different demands placed on it: the combination of social expectations and commercial requirements. The project team is investigating the different ways of talking about the value of 'Shakespeare' in literary criticism, educational and cultural policy, as well as theatre practice.

The research looks at commercial culture of early modern theatre and how that developed in the twentieth century. It draws on the Royal Shakespeare Company archive to research the traditions of performance in the Company and their changing relationship to public expectations.

The project explores the connections between cultural value and the cultural institutions that produce it. It also tests the claims of organisations that reproduce 'Shakespeare' for multi-cultural and inclusive public engagement.

The project is based at the University of Birmingham, and includes a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow and two Doctoral Students. This team-based approach allows for collaborative learning and for associations to be made across a range of research areas. The project team, by combining different strands of research, provides a much more comprehensive account of the relationships between the artistic, educational, economic and commercial dimensions of the cultural value of Shakespeare than could be provided by any one or more researchers working independently. This project will also inform future cultural and educational policy.

3D Reinforced Natural Fibre Woven Preforms and Eco-Composites

AHRC Research Grant

This inter-disciplinary project explores the synergies between 3D weave design and engineering composites. 3D woven fabric provides an opportunity to explore how aesthetic considerations within design can be combined with technical engineering approaches. The aim is to redirect technical design expertise, which has been optimised in aerospace engineering, with a creative impetus that will lead to the application of woven composite fabrics in more accessible design applications for public use.

These applications include interior, moulded textile composite parts for use in public seating, wall partitions, panels and fascias. The new materials will be able to compete in strength and appearance, and offer structural superiority and versatility, compared with a vast range of cosmetic laminates. It offers contemporary, dynamic, patterned composite surfaces, coupled with this in-built strength. This is also an environmentally conscious, safe disposal material for use by the design community. The research should also help the UK woven textile industry to compete globally by producing radical, new high-quality products.

This research requires high quality equipment, including a full digital weaving studio, various loom parts, moulding tools, raw materials, highly specific textile design software and numerous ancillary devices. The project is an example of where arts and humanities research has increasingly high capital costs; the AHRC grant for this two-year project is in the region of £400,000.

Through weave design, this project enables creative practice to be integrated into science and engineering fields. It is being led by the School of Art and Design, working in collaboration with the Engineering Composites Research Centre, at the University of Ulster.

Image, Text, Interpretation: e-Science, Technology and Documents

AHRC-EPSRC-JISC Arts and Humanities e-Science Initiative

Deciphering and interpreting manuscripts and documents is a central component of research into all periods of literature and history. Texts can, however, be difficult to read, particularly those in ancient Greek or Latin papyri, writing tablets and inscriptions, or medieval and early modern manuscripts. Even some modern handwritten texts require some extra help.

Advanced imaging and computational technology can overcome this obstacle. This project seeks to develop a system which will help arts and humanities researchers to read manuscripts and documents from a wide range of literatures and cultures by utilising e-Science technologies. Arts and humanities researchers are being trained as well as being provided with tailored tools and software.

Realising the potential of emerging computer technologies, including digital imaging, for researchers across the entire range of the arts and humanities to deal effectively with often obscure, damaged or difficult to interpret texts and documents will have an impact on how research is undertaken. The new software will support research that is characterised by the frequently collaborative deployment of complex, expert and often tacit knowledge, and which seeks to make clear the best possible fit of the textual evidence and minimising uncertainty in interpretation.

This inter-disciplinary research involves the Centre for the Study of Ancient Documents, University of Oxford, in co-operation with the Department of Engineering Science, also at the University of Oxford, and the School of Library, Archive and Information Studies at University College London. The team also includes a Doctoral Student, who will receive expert training in a field which will be increasingly important for the next generation of arts and humanities researchers working with textual material. The inter-disciplinarity becomes stronger and more embedded in the research community by the joint support by the AHRC, EPSRC and JISC.